

When You Are Pregnant, Drinking Alcohol Can Hurt Your Baby

When you are pregnant, your baby grows inside you. Everything you eat and drink while you are pregnant affects your baby. If you drink alcohol, it can hurt your baby's growth. Your baby may have problems that can last for the rest of his or her life.

There is a wide range of effects on children whose mothers drank alcohol while pregnant. Children who have the effects, called Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) may be born small and may have:

- problems eating and sleeping.
- problems seeing and hearing.
- trouble following directions and learning how to do simple things.
- trouble paying attention and learning in school.
- trouble getting along with others and controlling their behavior.¹

How does alcohol cause these problems?

Alcohol in the mother's body goes through her and enters the baby. Because the brain develops throughout pregnancy, it can be damaged any time.²

Parts of the brain, what they control, and what can be damaged by drinking alcohol:

Corpus Callosum involves rules, logic, impulses, and feelings. In a person with FASD the corpus callosum might be smaller than normal, and in some cases it is almost nonexistent.

Hippocampus: memory, learning and emotion

Hypothalamus: appetite, emotions, temperature and pain sensation

Cerebellum: coordination and movement, behavior and memory

Basal Ganglia: spatial memory and behaviors that allow a person to switch modes, work toward goals, predict results of behavior and the perception of time

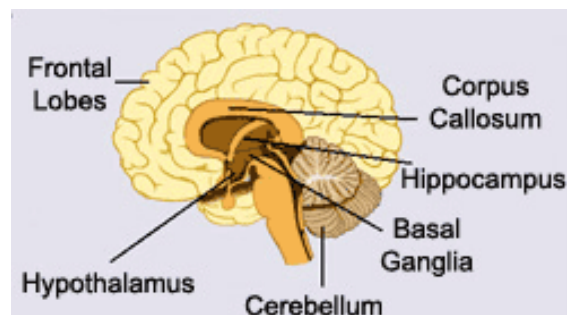
Frontal Lobe: impulses and judgment, specifically in the prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex controls problem solving, inhibitions, planning, memory, regulation of emotion

motivation and judgement. Even light drinking (average one-quarter ounce of alcohol daily) can have adverse affects on language and comprehension skills.³

The good news is that if a woman does not drink alcohol while she is pregnant, her baby will not have FASD.

Remember these four things:

- Pregnant women should not drink alcohol.
- Pregnant women who have already used alcohol during their pregnancy should stop right away.
- Women who are thinking about getting pregnant should stop using alcohol.
- Nearly half of all births in the United States are unplanned. Therefore, any woman who could become pregnant should talk to her doctor and take steps to lower the chance of exposing her baby to alcohol.⁴



For more information see www.fasdcenter.samhsa.gov/links/links.cfm.

Sources:

1. National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (1996). *Drinking and Your Pregnancy*. Downloaded May 22, 2006 from pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochure.htm
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3. Kellerman, T (2006). *Prenatal Alcohol Exposure and the Brain*. Downloaded May 22, 2006 from www.come-over.to/FAS/FASbrain.htm
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